

The Farm to Fork Exchange

Location of Project: Twin Falls, Idaho (Western Region)

Purpose: The Farm to Fork Exchange was envisioned as a promotional campaign for locally produced farm products. During the initial stages of the project, project organizers attempted to combine a web site that featured the offerings of local producers with a professional quality brochure that would promote buying local products. The goal of the project was to improve the profitability of local farmers by expanding existing marketing opportunities, creating new ones and providing incentives for additional cooperative marketing ventures.

Accomplishments: The project team consisted of seven local farmers, who developed the 'Farm to Fork Exchange' website at www.farmtoforkexchange.com. The website consisted of a home page, several additional pages and individual websites for four producers. Four web developers were hired to assist the primary project team members in creating the web pages. The website was publicized in the Idaho Rural Council's newsletter, at the Council's 2000 and 2001 annual meetings, the 2000 Harvest

Dinner, and at several other sustainable agriculture meetings. Nevertheless, the producers featured on the web site generated only a modest number of market leads as a result of their Internet site.

Lessons Learned: The Farm to Fork Exchange was not a great success. The project fell far short of reaching its original goal of increasing sales for participating producers. The principal problem with the project was that many of the participants were not ready for the project and the number of participants was too small. Producers were often not prepared to take full advantage of the project because they did not have the capacity to produce additional products to sell directly to consumers, and they were quite uncomfortable with computers or unfamiliar with the Internet.

Conclusion: To have a successful Internet-based cooperative marketing project, the project organizers concluded that one needs a critical mass of producers willing to make the investment in time and effort to develop a new market, and become proficient in Internet technology. They observed that:

- Having an Internet site is no substitute for a marketing plan

- Consumers need to know local products are available on the Internet
- Project participants must be fully committed to the project
- Doing homework/research on web page design and finding individuals who are capable of developing a professional quality web site is essential for developing a successful Internet-based business